

# Mistakes Grapplers Make



**Side Mount**

**Rob Gramer**

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# **The 10 Major Mistakes that Royally Screw Up Your Side Mount Game!**

Years ago Kurt Pellegrino inadvertently taught me a very valuable lesson about side mount control.

I was a blue belt at the time and probably outweighed Kurt by about 40 pounds. That didn't really matter though because unlike Kurt, I was neither a bjj black belt, nor had I wrestled since before I learning my ABC's.

Anyways, he passed my guard...pulled side control...and – I swear to Rickson Gracie – I thought I was going to die. (He put so much pressure on my guts I thought I was about to poop out my liver.)

This has happened many times since. And every time it's happened I've asked the guy I was grappling with how the hell he put so much pressure on me. Today, I'm going to share with you those secrets.

By the way, my name is Rob Gramer. I'm a bjj brown belt and I absolutely love the grappling game. I'm also a mechanical engineer.

The reason I think it's important to mention I'm an engineer is because my mind is wired to break down problems. I can't count the number of times I've spent awake at night analyzing why a certain submission didn't work...or...why I got swept in practice earlier tha evening.

And my engineering training has given me a certain step-by-step approach to breaking down problems...analyzing them...and finding the best possible way to fix them.

This report represents years of testing, tweaking and improving my side mount game. In it you'll learn:

- Why you should never put pressure directly on his chest in side mount (and the two points of contact that make it damn near impossible for him to escape).
- How to force your opponent to let you take his back...or...choke him unconscious with one arm!
- The single biggest mistake that lets the bottom guy pull guard when you're on top.
- How to exert two...three...four times more pressure from the top.

- The "cockroaches secret" to using less energy and hitting more submissions
- Why you absolutely must perfect underhook control if you want to master side mount (and escape from it too).
- How a famous golfers biggest strength cost him millions. And why this same mistake will wreck your bjj game now, tomorrow and for years to come.
- The #1 rule for escaping from the bottom (ignore this and you might as well quit bjj right now).
- And much, much more...

I hope you'll enjoy what I share here. I hope even more than you apply what is in this report to improve your side mount game.

I look forward to hearing about your success. If you have any questions about what is in this report, please email me at [rob@backchoke.com](mailto:rob@backchoke.com).

Thanks,  
Rob Gramer

P.S. Visit [www.backchoke.com](http://www.backchoke.com) for more cool bjj related stuff.

## ***Before we get to the meat of this report, a quick thanks.***

While every single person who I've ever finished a triangle on (and those who I've just tried to slap one on to, too) deserve thanks here, that would be impossible. But I would like to thank a few key individuals.

**Joe Mullings** – for having the ability to break down bjj techniques in such minute detail that it blows my mind...and...for running a fantastic academy, the Armory ([www.thearmory.tv](http://www.thearmory.tv)). I've been a student there since 2003 and it gets better every single year. The equipment is clean and state of the art. The students are respectful. And the instructors are world class.

**Raphael Chavez** – for making me wonder every single day how someone can be so damn good at bjj. And for giving me my brown belt.

**Eduardo Guedes** - for reminding me daily the benefits of hard work, dedication and heart. And for giving me my brown belt.

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**Hermes Franca** – for giving me my purple belt.

**Ricardo Texiera** – for being the first black belt I ever rolled with opening up my mind to the depths of this sport. And for giving me my blue belt.

**Marcel Ferreira** – for showing me how bjj can turn you into an absolute badass even if you have a broken neck.

**Bill DiFury** – for introducing me to the world of martial arts.

**Logan Day** – for helping me with editing and posing for the pictures in this report.

**Edson "Junior" Barboza** – for reminding me that I'm no good at Muay Thai and that I should stick to grappling.

And an early thank you to the recently added black belts instructors at the Armory who I haven't had the pleasure to get to know too well, yet I'm sure will be kicking my ass for years to come. Rodrigo Cavaca, Thiago Abreau, Marcus "Buchechea" Almeida and Luiz Cane.

## Top Side Mount Mistakes

A few years back I had the great (as in bad) idea to go out surfing right before a hurricane. The waves were huge and nasty and I almost drowned. I didn't, but my near death experience taught me a valuable lesson that is directly applicable to BJJ.

Here's the story.

I'm standing next to the pier in Juno Beach, Florida trying to figure out how the hell I'm going to paddle out. The waves are breaking out past the end of the pier (more than a football field in length). It's not a clean break where the waves come in sets and you can sneak through when they calm down. It's that nasty, pounding windchop plus swell that comes from all angles...sloppier than a drunk cougar prowling your local dive bar.

A big smile crosses my face.

I decide the only way out is to jump into a rip current that is created by the pier. This means I'll get sucked out to sea...swimming in overhead pounding surf...just inches away from barnacle encrusted concrete beams...with lines and sharp hooks raining down from the fisherman on the pier.

Sounds scary, but I've done it a hundred times. I jump in and before you can say "what an idiot" I'm out past the break.

That's where my good fortune ends. The first wave doubles up on me and the bottom drops out...meaning I'm about ten feet in the air with nothing under me and a few thousand gallons of water about to pile drive me into the ocean floor.

I'm sure the fisherman are laughing.

Fast forward a few seconds and I hit the sandy bottom in a mixture of salt and sand and foam. Its pitch black, I'm not sure if I'm upside down or right side up and I'm at least twenty feet under water. Time to swim back to the surface.

I find my surfboard leash and follow it back up (because surfboards float you can always grab your leash and be sure to make it to the surface) just in



time to get smashed by another wave. The salt, sand and foam smash cycle begins again. I get to the surface just in time to take a big gulp of air and I'm met by another crashing wave.

My lungs fill with salt water. I'm back underwater and I think for the first time in my life I might actually die. I've been close to death before, but never where I could actually think about it while I was in the moment. I struggle back to the surface...grab my board for dear life...vomit a gallon of seawater (I swear there was a fish in there)...and then...finally I'm free.

I take the sweetest gulp of air I've ever inhaled in my life.

That's what being stuck on the bottom in side mount should feel like. And that's what I'm going to show you how to do today.

## **Top Side Mount Mistakes #1: The Chest to Chest Fallacy**

Quick BJJ pop-quiz...what is the strongest/thickest bone in the human body?

(Before I give you the answer let me assure you that – prior to what you may be thinking – the answer to this question has EVERYTHING to do with BJJ...specifically controlling and conquering opponents in this AND every other position.)

Ok, let's continue.

The strongest/thickest bone in the human body is the hip bone. It has to be tough because it connects a few of the strongest muscles in the body...the lower back, butt and leg muscles. Now, knowing this little bit of physiology gives you a huge advantage in BJJ because even if you didn't know one single technique you would know...

...that the hips are FRICKIN STRONG!

So, being the smart human being you are you could easily deduce that if you were to fight another human being in a ground battle you would want to do one of two things.

1) You would want to stay way far away from the hips!

...or...

2) If you DID decide to control the hips, you would want every single pound of your body weight smothering his hips.

And then on the flip side of this equation you would want to use YOUR hips to maximum advantage, right? Ok, enough of the preamble. Here's how this relates to the title of this section, the "chest to chest fallacy".



*This Look OK, Right? HUGE MISTAKE!*

Too many new grapplers are told that side mount is a "chest to chest" position. And it makes sense right? When you are in that position your chest is right on his, right? Yes, and this is a HUGE mistake! Why?

Well, let's go back to our all-or-nothing hip scenario. Take a closer look at that last picture and you'll see I am neither directly on his hips, nor am I as far away from them (while still maintaining control) as I could be.

In fact, I'm a little bit away from them and a little bit close to them. And this presents a huge problem! Because if he bucks up hard I go flying off and completely lose the position.

Try it and you'll see.

How do you fix this? Take a look at the following two pictures.



*Far Away From the Hips...and then...Directly on Top of Them!*

Now you're going to learn something that will shoot your top game through the roof!

What happens when he performs a hard hip up? His hips come off the ground a lot...his stomach comes off the ground a bit...and his chest comes



off the ground a little (that's what throws you off when you are in chest to chest).

But what about his feet and shoulders? Since they are the support structure for his hips bump, they have to stay on the ground, right?

So, what do you think would happen if all your weight was on his shoulders when he bucked up? That's right bucko! You wouldn't move on iota!

So, if you moved all of your weight OFF OF HIS CHEST AND ONTO HIS SHOULDERS he could buck all day like a rodeo-bred bronco and not affect you whatsoever. Hmmm, that's pretty interesting huh?

"Ok, Rob," you may be thinking "but the OTHER picture shows you laying on his hips. Why the hell would I want to do that if his hips are so powerful?" I'll tell you why.

Sometimes you grapple against Hercules...and you simply cannot get all of your weight up onto his shoulders (probably because he has two howitzer cannons for arms). Anyways, there's no use to fight against his arms in this situation.

And if you can't fight against his arms, you sure as hell won't last if he starts bucking you...UNLESS YOU PUT ALL OF YOUR WEIGHT DIRECTLY ON HIS HIPS. In this situation, since there is more weight on his hips you actually SLOW DOWN HOW FAST HE CAN BUCK YOU OFF!

And if you slow this down you have a much better chance to counter, adjust and keep the position.

Don't believe me? Test this out for yourself.

Grab your grappling buddy and secure the "chest on chest" position. Have him buck you, and see how far you fly. Next, secure the position where your hips are really high on his shoulder. Have him buck you, and see how his hips do not affect you whatsoever. Finally, put all of your weight on his hips. Have him buck you, and see how *little* it really affects you (compared to the velocity you fly off when you're on his chest).

And you can thank me later.

## Top Side Mount Mistakes #2: Cut off the Head and the Body Will Die

Most new grapplers do not understand the magnitude of just how important it is to control your opponents head. Why is it so important? Here are seven reasons off the top of my head.

1. He can't look at you...which makes it hard to see your submission set-ups.
2. Pain. And he'll do dumb stuff to try and escape the pain (Hint: Which means he might give you submissions)
3. You don't have to worry about his arm that is trapped under you
4. Place your shoulder right and you could choke him
5. It's hard to pull guard
6. It's hard to defend the mount take from here
7. He can only roll away from you...which means you can take his back

I could go on for pages, but I think you get the point. So mistake number two – which should be pretty obvious by now – is not getting head control.



*Shoulder Pressure and Head Control*

So how do you get (and more importantly, keep) head control? There are lots of points to consider, but the quickest way to master head control is to TRY AND CHOKE YOUR OPPONENT USING JUST YOUR SHOULDER!

Why? Because this forces you to concentrate on figuring out how to manipulate your body so you apply maximum pressure with your shoulder control (and guess what, that's exactly what we're about in these next few mistakes).

Practice this for a month and you'll be an absolute monster in top side control.

## Top Side Mount Mistakes #3: Face down, Ass Up

I am now going to talk to you on the subject of having a good base like nobody has ever talked to you before.

Listen, about two paragraphs ago I promised to reveal to you how to manipulate your body so you apply maximum pressure with your shoulder control. I am now about to keep that promise.

But before I do that I'm going to show you how most guys go about applying shoulder pressure (especially wrestlers)...and why it makes you a really crappy grappler. Hark unto me.

Analyze the following picture...



*Is what I'm doing here good? Or bad?*

What the picture shows is a big guy (me) driving my shoulder into a poor sucker (Logan). That's good right? If you answered yes than you need to pay extra special attention to the words I'm about to write.

THAT IS NOT GOOD!

Why? Well, allow me to explain something. My ideas on developing a super heavy top game are based on four concepts

- #1: Put as much weight as humanely possible on him (I talk about this more in the next mistake)
- #2: Focus this weight on ONE part of his body (in this case his face)
- #3: Do not do ANY of these if it gives him space to maneuver and improve his position.

With those three rules in mind, what is the exact thing I am doing when I lift my hips and drive my shoulder into his face? That's right! I'm giving him TONS of space to pull his hips underneath me and re-establish guard.

That's no good. So make sure you keep those hips close to the ground (but not *laying* on the ground – see rule #1 AND the next mistake). And instead, push off your toes to DRIVE you shoulder into his face from the side...not straight down.

## **Top Side Mount Mistakes #4: The Knee Mistake**

Here is a quick question that will forever change the way you view BJJ (in a good way).

If you weigh 200 pounds and balance your weight equally on both feet, how much weight is pressing through each foot? Ok, next question. If you weigh 200 pounds and stand on one foot, how much weight is pressing through that one foot?

Answers to those questions: The former is 100 pounds on each foot and the latter is 200 pounds on the single foot. Think about the significance of these answers for a moment. (Really, think about it for a moment...I'll wait).

Ok, enough thinking.

Now imagine you are on top in side control with a guy pinned under you. Quick question – which do you think will cause your opponent to feel more pressure...

a) If your chest is on him and only your feet are touching the ground?

...or...

b) If your chest is on him and your knees, feet and elbows are touching the ground?

This isn't a trick question. Answer A would make him feel a ton more pressure!

Can you guess what the next mistake is? That's right...being lazy! If you just lay on top of your opponent with your knees and elbows on the ground you are not exerting near the weight and pressure you could be. In fact, making this single mistake could cut your top game pressure in half!

If you have trouble holding people down, it's probably because you are letting your elbows and knees touch the mat (and this is the exact reason why little guys can sometimes feel like wrecking balls rolling over you).

Get your knees and elbows off the mat.

### Top Side Mount Mistakes #5: Captain of Hooks

Do not – I repeat – DO NOT let the bottom guy get the far-side underhook when you are on top. BAD THINGS WILL HAPPEN (and by bad I mean he'll sweep you, reverse you, take your back or *at least* pull guard).

What's a far side underhook? Look at the following two pictures...



Left: Bad for me. Good for him. Right: Good for me. Bad for him.

The picture on the left shows Logan with the underhook. In this position he can do all sorts of cool stuff...like take my back, roll into me, roll away from me and on and on. I can basically fight like hell in a vain attempt to stop him from doing those things.

I don't want to do that. I want to smash him.

And smashing him is simply impossible when he has the underhook.

How do you fix this? Learn to pummel. Become a serious student of underhooks. And always fight for the underhook. Nothing will improve your game faster than being known as "the damn guy who always gets the underhook". More on this in the next section.

By the way, there are ways to secure underhook control without actually getting the underhook. I guarantee this isn't about Jedi mind trickers. Confused? Well then you need my free report on grips. Go here to download it --> [www.backchoke.com/free-stuff-from-rob](http://www.backchoke.com/free-stuff-from-rob)

### Top Side Mount Mistakes #6: It's *still* all about the hips

Earlier on in this section of top side mount mistakes (mistake #1 to be precise) I rambled on and wrote,

*"The strongest/thickest bone in the human body is the hip bone. It has to be tough because it connects a few of the strongest muscles in the*

*body...the lower back, butt and leg muscles. Now, knowing this little bit of physiology gives you a huge advantage in BJJ because even if you didn't know one single technique you would know...*

*...that the hips are FRICKIN STRONG!*

*So, being the smart human being you are you could easily deduce that if you were to fight another human being in a ground battle you would want to do one of two things.*

*1) You would want to stay way far away from the hips!*

*...or...*

*2) If you DID decide to control the hips, you would want every single pound of your body weight smothering his hips."*

Well, I lied. But I promise I did it for your own good. Actually, I didn't lie *per se*, I just didn't tell you the whole story. And now – as Paul Harvey would say – is the rest of the story.

While you are on top you need to have a bead on what your opponents hips are doing. But this does not mean you have to lock them down and *prevent* them from moving. Nope. You just have to know where they are and what they are doing.

And that involves acting like a cockroach (gross!)

Do you know what a cockroach looks like? On its head are two little antennae. They reach out in front of the cockroach and feel around. They are not stiff. Instead they bend, give and generally act like FEEDBACK RECEPTIVE MECHANISMS...meaning they tell the cockroach what is going on in the immediate world around it.

Interesting, huh?

Just like that nasty little insect, you need a feedback receptive mechanism to keep track of your opponents hips – something to take in information (so you can make smart choices)...but not necessarily push, pull or do any work.

And two things that work great for this job is the arm or the knee that is closest to your opponent's hips (see picture).





### *My "Cockroach" Feelers*

Notice how my right knee and right elbow are "clamped" onto his hips. Clamp is a bad word, because I'm not using them to hold him in place. Instead I'm using them to gauge where his hips move. This way I know exactly what he's trying to do (if he tries to pull guard he has to move his hips away first...if he tries to roll away he moves his hips up and away)...and I can react accordingly to improve my position or submit him.

Now here's the big, big secret. Most new guys try and use their arms to manipulate their opponents. Bad idea. Instead relax your arms and let them just feel where your opponent is...and then...move, rotate or slide your hips to counter his every move. Nothing will improve your bjj more than this.

Ok, that's enough about the top game. Now let's help you get out from under this position.

## Bottom Side Mount Mistakes

How many ways can you get submitted in side mount?

Kimura, Americana and other armlocks are pretty obvious. There are quite a few gi chokes. Head and arm chokes. The under-utilized wrist lock. And there is even a sneaky kneebar. And what about transitions...knee-on-belly, mount and back takes galore. And of course there is the crushing, take-your-breath away pressure.

Why do I mention all this?

Because most grapplers don't realize how *dangerous* bottom side mount is. It's one of those positions where the top guy has EVERYTHING going for him...and you have nothing! Keep that in mind as you read the bottom side mount mistakes.

### Bottom Side Mount Mistakes #1: Captain of Hooks!

Here's a simple rule of thumb for you: Whenever your arm is in between his two arms you are at risk of getting armlocked. Armbar, Kimura, Americana...whatever. If you want to avoid these arm submissions do NOT let him manipulate your arm between his two.

Why am I telling you this? Because it directly relates to the most common mistake I see when grapplers get stuck in bottom side mount.

And that mistake is, letting him get an underhook.



*The Underhook: This Sucks for Me*

Besides leaving you vulnerable for arm submissions, securing an underhook gives your opponent a few advantages that really makes your life suck, such as:

- It's next to impossible to roll away
- He's usually high up on your body, meaning you're not pulling guard again unless you have gumby-like flexibility

- It's hard to breathe
- Your submissions are severely limited
- And if he has a headlock he can apply maximum pressure directly to your face (enough even to submit you!)

For these reasons (and many more) you don't want to give up the underhook. So, what advice do I have for you avoid the dreaded underhook?

First, learn how to get out of it. The best way to do this is ask your instructor for some pummeling drills and drill, drill drill.

But much better than getting out of an underhook is learning how to make sure that never happens in the first place. To do this, you must understand – and be ready to defend – the exact moment you are most at risk of getting underhooked.

Here it is... the big mistake that allows your opponent to get an underhook is NOT DEFENDING IT WHILE HE'S PASSING YOUR GUARD.

That's right. At some point when the guy is passing your guard you just KNOW he's passed. At that point it's pointless to keep trying to defend. In fact, if you continue to fight back you usually SET UP his underhook. Instead you want to set up your escape from bottom side. At that point you want to DEFEND THE UNDERHOOK *BEFORE* HE IS FINISHED PASSING!

How do you do that? Check out the following picture...



If you look closely you'll see my hand is dipping down so that I get the underhook BEFORE HE HAS FINISHED THE PASS! This way he doesn't slide in the underhook during the pass...I secure the underhook...and I'm in a perfect position to reverse the guy.

Pretty sneaky, huh!

## Bottom Side Mount Mistakes #2: Out of the Flame and into the Fire!

Back in high school I almost helped my buddy burn his grandma's house down. The story contains an important lesson about side mount and BJJ in general. Listen closely...

It's Friday night, my buddy's party is on full tilt and we had one of those *really bad ideas* after a few too many drinks. It involved baseball bats and tennis balls soaked in gasoline that we lit on fire (how else were we supposed to see them, it was night-time...duh).

Long story short, I belted one of these tennis balls into his garage (completely on accident, I swear). The flaming tennis ball landed in a basket of old oily rags. Within seconds the garage began to resemble the entrance to hell itself.

We were drunk but we weren't dumb. With definite grounding, revocation of allowances and possible jail time staring us in the face we rushed into the garage...grabbed a few fire extinguishers...and doused the flames.

The moral of this story...when things are getting bad, STOP them before they get worse.

And that's EXACTLY what you need to do when someone passes your guard...because their next move is about to make things really, really worse (for you).

For example, a popular transition from side mount is to go straight to mount. And this is made entirely possible because the guy on the bottom DOES NOT PUT HIS KNEE UP TO DEFEND THE MOUNT ATTACK. (By the way, when I put something in caps it means it's *really important*...i.e. this is the mistake I'm referring to in this section.) Take a look at the following two pictures.



*Lazy Crossed Leg BAD...Active Crossed Leg GOOD!*

The subtitle tells it all. But a lot of guys mess this up, or they'll forget , or they'll keep their leg slack and leave a lot of space right for the dude to slip straight to mount. So always make sure to put your knee right into his side...or up into his ribs to defend mount.

### **Bottom Side Mount Mistakes #3: You're So Strong, I'm Impressed (NOT)**

"Every strength extended is a weakness." I don't know who said that, but that person was smart!

A story to illustrate my point.

A while back there was this golfer. You might know him. His name is Tiger.

Tiger used his fame and notoriety to attract throngs of women. And – because of his fame and notoriety – he believed he could continue to do this without his wife knowing. He was wrong. In an ironic twist of fate, a golf club – the same tool he used to earn hundreds of millions – was used to bash in his SUV, (supposedly) assault him, and send sponsors (and millions in sponsorship money) running for the hills.

How much did Tiger's supposed strength cost him? Millions? Maybe billions?

Every strength extended is a weakness.



*HULK CRUSH YOU LIKE SOFT TOMATO!*

Here's how this applies to bjj...especially to guys who are really, really strong. If you are on the bottom in side mount and you HUG FOR DEAR LIFE you do yourself a HUGE disservice. A few reasons.

- 1) You are using a depleting resource – muscular strength decreases with use, so if your only defense is to hold on tight your muscles will tire and it will be easier to finish you.

- 2) You are not learning proper ways to defend – you are actually just stalling, which is the same thing as wasting time. Time you could spend experimenting with actual defensive moves.
- 3) You are opening yourself up for TONS OF SUBMISSIONS – yes, holding like this gives your opponent a positive feedback mechanism that a) allows your opponent to "feel" exactly where your arms are (even though he can't see them) and b) use stronger muscles to put your arms in a position to submit you (like his legs and hips).

These are all bad things in the long term and will not help you become a better grappler whatsoever.

That's why it doesn't pay to hug for dear life, even if you are super tired and just holding on for dear life. Instead you should use your arms in a more productive way (which we'll explore in the next mistake).

### **Bottom Side Mount Mistakes #4: Don't be a Dead Fish**

This is by far the BIGGEST MISTAKE! And not just when you're stuck in side mount, but ANYTIME YOU ARE ON YOUR BACK.

It's huge! If you can avoid this one mistake while you're on the bottom...dare I say...you will be damn near impossible to pass or hold down and your opponent will be in constant fear of sweeps and submissions.

Did I say huge? I meant MONUMENTAL!

If the number one rule of bjj is always being able to move your hips, then you always want to put your body in a position to move your hips. And there is no other position that freezes your hips in place more than being...

**FLAT ON YOUR BACK!**

It's the #1 BJJ death sentence! Why? Because you can only move your hips up and down...and if your opponent is nowhere near your hips this up and down motion is about as useful as a ski jacket on a tropical beach.

So if being flat on your back is bad...do you want to know what is good? Of course you do! Well here's the secret – GET ON YOUR SIDE!





*Get OFF Your Back And Onto Your SIDE!*

This frees you to perform the holy grail of BJJ – the hip escape. Once you are on your side you can move your hips away and spin to your knees...or...shoot them back in and pull guard. You can make space to slip a foot in under his thigh and sweep him...or pry yourself into half guard. If you have an underhook you can slip yourself around to his back.

You can't do any of this if you lie flat on your back. So the big, Big, BIG lesson here is – no matter what he does – DO NOT LET HIM PIN YOU FLAT ON YOUR BACK!

Did you like this report? Do you want to find out what other types of mistakes may be screwing up your bjj game (like what's going wrong with your gi chokes? Armbars? And why you keep getting your guard passed?)

If so, I urge you to check out [www.backchoke.com/bjj-mistakes/](http://www.backchoke.com/bjj-mistakes/)

It shows you how to get your hands on an encyclopedia of bjj mistakes in all of the major positions and most common submissions. It's the results of over a decade of hard work and studying this awesome grappling art we call Brazilian jiu jitsu.

Here's the link again [www.backchoke.com/bjj-mistakes/](http://www.backchoke.com/bjj-mistakes/). Go check it out now.